

Charles Burgess's recollections of the transition from college to university

[Vaughan: The college became a university in 1969. How did you feel about this change?]

Burgess: Well I was--I was basically in favor of it. I mean I knew it was--I knew it was a stretch to call ourselves a university just with a few graduate programs as we had, but we were getting there. And certainly it was a sign of what we wanted to be. Interestingly enough this is one of the issues in which the Faculty Senate split. I remember there was a vote in which... I can't remember which side won, but it was about evenly split between whether we wanted to change from ODC to ODU. And again the people in the more conservative schools tended not to want to change. (pg. 5)

[Vaughan: So when Bugg became president then, what was the campus climate like, especially among faculty?]

Burgess: The first year he--just a couple of months after he got here, he had an opening faculty meeting in which he said two or three very important things. He said, one, we are going to become a university and that has certain very specific implications for the faculty. It means that we're not just a teaching institution that we have to do research. It means that the criteria for promotion and tenure and salary increments, which had been more or less across the board up to that point, have got to be based on your success not only as a teacher but as a researcher. And he said however as a university we're not just going to be an imitation of the University of Virginia and of the traditional university. We've got to, we've got to decide what kind of a university we're going to be and focus on that...Well all of those things brought very negative reactions from different groups of faculty. After all, all of the older faculty including me had been brought here on the understanding that this was a teaching institution and that they were not expected to do research. (pg. 5-6)

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Burgess: Jim [Bugg] was interested in building a university but not a typical UVA type university -- and so the first thing that needed to be done was planning. It was in effect designing what kind of university this should be. And we spent... Jim and Harold [Eickhoff] and I spent a large part of our time, and Harold and I were the travelers in this... We went around to other institutions, trips to New York, trips to Washington, consultations with all kinds of people. I remember one time Harold and I went up to the Brookings Institution and got a number of people to sit around and talk with us about what an urban university is. And we developed slowly and with lots of joint meetings with deans and others and faculty committees which were sometimes extremely contentious. We developed a series of plans. There were long range plans this time, nobody had thought of strategic yet, and with university emphases established on them. We had at one point 6 emphases. I can't name them right now, but most of them began with the word "urban" with the idea that we would be a distinctively urban institution and that that would be our niche in the higher education system in Virginia. (pg. 10-11)

Full interview at:

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